

Tall Enough for You?

by Jaeger Gipsy Danger

Category: Halo

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Master Chief/John-117, S. Palmer, T. Lasky

Status: Completed

Published: 2013-06-28 22:15:36

Updated: 2016-04-02 00:49:12

Packaged: 2016-04-26 22:22:52

Rating: M

Chapters: 8

Words: 20,510

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Sometimes grief takes you to places you never expected to go. If it's with the right person you may learn things you never thought to ask about & heal in ways you didn't know you were wounded. At a moment when you want nothing more than to sink into your armor & never emerge, someone comes along and asks you why.

1. Tall Enough For You? 1

TITLE: Tall Enough For You?

CHAPTER: Prologue

AN: I recently downloaded the still from the end of the game cut scene where Master Chief walked passed Commander Palmer and a few other Spartans IVs. It haunts me. Look at it. It's easy to miss when you watch the vid. Look at that body language. Now, there's a story needs telling.

* * *

><p>"What's past is prolog," William Shakespeare. The Tempest_, Act 2, Scene I

* * *

><p>Even in the midst of his grief, he noticed her. She stands straight and tall and watches him as walks by. He counts four other Spartans, but they disappear in the aura of the warrior woman. Chilled to the bone by the specter of death dogging his steps, she stirs a memory. With her reddish hair and velvet brown eyes, she's the warmth and rustle of fall colors.<p>

Her stare penetrates his visor with a piercing blow of something he cannot identify. Exhausted, depleted and vulnerable, he doesn't trust the feeling of weakness it leaves behind. He must keep moving

forward, push away the pain and banish it from his awareness.

It's her vibrancy that reaches out to him and slows his steps. Alive in every line of her youthful body, she leans toward him. She represents life, a sparkle of life in a universe crowded with war, death and loss. He returns her searching gaze. For a moment, he wants to stop and ask, do you know how I can be walking when I am dead? Why am I here, when everything I am is back there, shattered in the explosion of the Didact's ship, floating lost in the debris of Requiem? The place where Cortana's sacrifice extinguished the enduring blue light of my purpose and meaning.

Do you know why, Commander? Why is my heart still beating?

In the earnest depth of her eyes, he sees the well-lit path of her glory. His steps take him to the end of his. In truth, his path ended with the words, _Welcome home, John_.

What was home? What did that represent to him? The volatile chill of Cortana's embrace; the quicksilver azure of her intellect and the indigo eyes pinning him to his truth, the mission, and goals. When had he begun to cling to her definition of existence? When had she become his reason to live, to move, to survive?

Do you know the answer, Commander?

With her arms spread open and palms forward she responded to the broken warrior with the unexpected need to take action. To stop him. For buried beneath the layers of her Spartan armor beats a woman's heart. It's the instinct to express the art of healing, to offer succor and relief.

Wait, Master Chief. Let it be me.

His feet stubbornly push him forward, and the arm that reached toward her falls back to his side. His long arms continue swinging from his shoulders, and the armored hand that flexed open in response to her gesture closes.

The moment, the glance, and the gesture end as he walks away. The Commander turned back to her Spartans, reminding herself he is unreachable behind the twin barriers of armor and training.

However, their question remains the same.

Are you the one?

2. Tall Enough For You? 2

TITLE: Tall Enough for You?

CHAPTER: Two, A New Path

* * *

><p>"Happiness is not something. It comes from your own actions."
â€"Dalai Lama<p>

* * *

><p>Commander Sarah Palmer

It's my custom to take a walk before turning in. The exercise cleared my head from the stress of missions and paperwork. The peace and quiet provided me the opportunity to think and plan for the next duty day. The corridors at this level of the ship are kept at half-light and often deserted. Today had been especially difficult. We almost lost one of my best Spartans. Severely injured in a training accident, the Docs promised me Gabriel Thorne would make a full recovery. Although I never allowed my fire teams to know, he's one of my favorites. I still worried.

Thorne lost his entire family on New Phoenix. He never spoke of it, not to me anyway. The grief was there in those expressive brown eyes of his. We'd all lost someone, but his loss seemed more tragic, perhaps because he still looked so young. Thorne was a quiet and courageous young man who always got the job done; with show-offs like DeMarco and Hoya were the same, but with egos to match. In their defense, without that bravado, courage, and drive they couldn't do the jobs required of them. As commander of the fire teams, I must have more of that energy than all of them. We are young, strong, fearless and without peer. We are Spartans.

I listened to my frenetic thoughts and the sound of my hurried footsteps echoing in the darkened and hollow corridors. Like drums beating to the tune of war, my heartbeat pounded too loudly in my ears. It was on nights like this that I had to force myself to stop and allow a bulkhead to be my support if even for a few moments. I had to compose myself, reign in my thoughts and put things into perspective. _Slow down, Palmer. Breathe._

I decided to push on and finish my walk. I'm restless, anxious, and I don't know why. Not really. Perhaps the gym is the place for me tonight. A few more yards and I hear something ahead of me and stop. Through the silence and gloom came the sound of voices. Was I about to interrupt a personal conversation? I stayed quiet because I was certainly not interested in busting crewmembers for fraternization. Before I could retrace my steps, I recognized Captain Lasky's voice. But with whom is he talking?

The Skipper said something, which sounded like, "...soldiers and humanity are not two different things. Soldiers are not machines; they're just people."

First, silence. Then, "I'll let you have the deck to yourself, Chief."

As Captain Lasky's footsteps echoed away, another voice whispered into the gloom. The words, spoken with such intensity and longing, my heart pounded in response. The tone of his voice echoed my personal issues. I stepped closer but stayed just out of sight.

"She said that to me once. About not being a machine."

Then, as if he were looking right at me, he inclined his helmeted head in my direction. "Commander Palmer?"

So much for stealth.

"How did you know I was there?"

He probably wished I would just go away. But I didn't resist the temptation to join him by the view screen. He could kick me out in a minute or two.

He turned his head toward me but didn't answer.

"Of course, you knew," shaking my head and ignoring any embarrassment I felt at snooping on their private conversation. I knew precisely how he identified me. It was my job to know the Spartan Mjolnir armor's tactical and battlefield capabilities down to the smallest microprocessor. Surprisingly, I managed to stop myself from another sarcastic response. Now was not the time. The Enigma, the man in front of me, was grieving for the only real partner he'd ever known. I should walk away, just as the Skipper had. I knew all about weapons, tactics, how to yell, motivate, order and belittle, but to have a simple conversation with a man? Pfft, I couldn't even have a conversation with Captain Lasky without falling into the defensive habit of sarcasm and humor.

"Well, have you figured it out?" That came out as an accusation and not at all how I meant to say it.

Again, he didn't answer.

He reminded me of the many ONI Intelligence Officers I've met over the years. When things were quiet, they kept to themselves. There were the sleeper agents who merged in seamlessly, but the Field Operatives were something else entirely. Like a broken and out of shape puzzle piece, they knew they no longer fit in.

I had heard the rumors about the Spartan-IIIs. No scratch that â€" Osman and Parangosky told me about how the IIIs came into existence. They were all kids, trained and forged to be the best of the best. It was tragically sad; these men and women never had the opportunity to know and experience what they gave up so much to protect. In a way, they were so much like the ONI Field Ops I've met. Two sides of the same coin with the exception that one chose and the other were forced. Armed with that knowledge, I decided on how to level with the Chief.

"Look, I'm serious. I want to know, because with this war and my responsibilities I'm not just beginning to feel like a machine."

My head nodded with my words. I'd never thought of it this way, but now that I'm saying it aloud, it all makes sense. "It helps me function and gets me through the day. Helps me order those men and women into life-threatening situations and compartmentalize. I get all that. It's part of the job. That's what they teach you in Spartan school and Officer's Training. The consequences? I'm filled with hundreds of tiny boxes of compartmentalized emotions and not much else."

Where had all these words come from and why do I suddenly feel as if I'm confessing something. I stopped talking and walked over to the viewscreen. I wondered how he would take what I was about to say? I didn't even know how I felt about it because I'd just thought of it.

"Master Chief, I wonder if, of all the crew on this ship, perhaps we could help each other." The only answer I got was a shake of his head. Then he nearly flinched when I placed my hand on his arm. "Let me help."

He carefully moved his arm from under my hand. "Ma'am, I don't understand."

"I don't plan to waste your time telling you how much I admire you or how compelling you are or that I comprehend Cortana's death."

"It would be wrong..."

"Ah, so you do understand."

Silence again, though he continued to stare at me. Not that I would ever admit it, but the strength of his regard through that visor was intimidating. After a few moments, I dropped my eyes and turned to leave.

"Stay, if that is your wish."

My stout Spartan heart skipped a very human beat. "It is."

I gave him some space and returned my attention to the viewscreen. Earth hung out there against the stars, like a precious sapphire, bright and eternal. "She's beautiful and yet so vulnerable," I commented to the view screen and never expected an answer.

The words he spoke next took me by surprise because instead of the ten feet I'd left between us he was standing right behind me.

"Yes, she is."

I felt his fingers pull the band holding my hair back. The unaccustomed sensation of my hair swinging over my cheeks startling me. As if that simple gesture left me vulnerable, as if the armor, and military bearing deserted me. I suddenly felt as if I'd been unmasked.

Wait. A compliment? A compliment from the Master Chief? My stomach did a slow flip. Maybe I should keep going? Or maybe I should shut the hell up and go to bed?

"Chief, I think happiness is too big a word for people like you and me. I think I can promise you some peace. Even if a moment is all, we can afford."

Hidden behind his armor there's no other way I can think of to break through to him. I rose up on my toes and pressed my cheek against his helmet. Before releasing him, I swiped two fingers across his faceplate. That most intimate of Spartan gestures got a reaction, and his hands went around my waist.

"What are you doing?" His timbered voice rumbled into the silence. His tone both a question and a warning.

"Trying to show you that I'm a Spartan just like you and you can trust me. I'm very sorry about Cortana. She's a good ship with a fine crew. I believe, if you allow it, you'll find some piece of mind

here. Get some sleep, Master Chief. Goodnight, "

It was a gamble with the Spartan smile. It belonged exclusively to the old and superior breed of IIs. These soldiers could handle any situation as demonstrated by the Chief when he cleared out an LZ that my team and I could barely manage ourselves. The smile, however, was a uniquely intimate gesture. When he didn't respond, I inclined my head to him and wished him a second good night.

An hour later, I was in my quarters, running a towel over my wet hair when the door opened. Standing there in my UNSC issue briefs and a tank top with my hair falling around my face, I couldn't imagine who would merely walk in. Not even DeMarco would go that far. The height and unmistakable size immediately identified my visitor. He just stood in the doorway with the corridor light illuminating him from behind. With his face and eyes completely in shadow the effect added to his already formidable demeanor. The towel slipped from my hands.

"Come in," I murmured and thought, come in before someone walks down the hall and sees you staring at me that way or me dressed in my underwear. I still had to take him by the hand and pull him into the room. The door slid shut behind him just as I heard Paul DeMarco's voice in the corridor, banging on doors and yelling for the team to hurry up. Everyone in Spartan Town was excited to get down to Earth. Thankfully, the door closed before he made it to my end of the corridor.

Then I got my first look at Master Chief without his armor. He had changed into UNSC Spartan Combat Readiness Gear. His short brown hair contained just a hint of gray. Incredibly broad shoulders and muscled arms over a narrow waist spoke to his strength. Handsome and compelling, his pale complexion and hooded cobalt eyes " that were once brown " reflected his soul.

Most people learned how to hide that depth of emotion, but he didn't hide it. Maybe he never learned to. Then I realized it was his way of giving an olive branch. If the rumors were right, I knew he could easily mask his emotion. Originally intended to crush Insurrectionists the IIs weren't just war machines. My natural reticence made me want to him ask why he allowed himself to seem vulnerable in front of a stranger.

We watched each other for a full minute before I finally walked up to him and embraced him the same way I had when he was in his armor. Only this time, when his hands landed on my waist they weren't covered in armor-reinforced gauntlets and the skin on my abdomen and waist are bare to his touch. He must have showered too because he smelled good. Good enough to "Whoa, hold on Palmer; one step at a time._

Resting my forehead against his shoulder all the stress and all the worry flowed out of me, filling me with a need that had been dogging me for weeks. I didn't want to be anywhere else in the universe except right here with this man. From reading his service record to staring at him like a damn teenager when he came aboard, he's as attractive and charismatic as I'd always imagined. I decided to take one more step and kissed his cheek.

"I'm glad you're here," I said and meant it. He didn't respond,

quietly watched my face. Now there's a silent 6 foot 10 inch giant in my quarters.

"Maybe I should get dressed?" I offered.

He looked into my eyes, looking for what? Trust? Truth? I think he must have found it when he said, "That won't be necessary."

He followed up his answer by tightening his grip. When his hands began to move, I forced myself to stay still and just watched his face. I thought he might need to see my expression and that he'd watch me for my reaction. Whatever he observed on my face had to be honest. He would be suspicious of anything less. I leaned on his the bulwark of his body. The strength and warmth in his hands soaked through to my bones.

One hand stayed on my shoulder while the other tipped my face up to explore my face. Fingertips glided over my cheekbones, over my ears, my eyes and through my hair. My eyes slid closed, and I realized I was trembling. While I marveled at the gentleness of his touch, his thumb ran across my lower lip.

"Commander Palmer, I am here at your invitation. If you've changed your mind, please say so now."

I let my actions answer for me when I let my tongue touch his thumb. I could tell he liked it when he sucked in a breath. So with my eyes open and staring into his I caught his hand and pushed his thumb gently and slowly into my mouth. It was his turn to close his eyes, and his fingers flexed involuntarily around my cheek. The hand moved again as he began to explore the inside of my mouth with his thumb. When I closed my mouth around it, he spoke again.

"Sarah?"

Oh, the way he said my name, part question, part plea. I could get used the sound and his breath caressing my cheek. How did he do that? Put so much meaning into just a few words. Then his eyes widened in response when I sunk my teeth into the meat of his thumb. For a few moments, we played tug of war.

When I finally released his fingers, he traced a line down my neck with the tip of his wet thumb and around the curved edge of my top. Now he was paying attention to my reaction. I hope he's no longer waiting for rejection or that he'd made a mistake by coming here. He experimented by sliding his fingers under the narrow band of fabric at my shoulder. Pulling the fabric slowly down and baring my shoulder. Apparently, he liked what he saw on my face because he pulled the other one down. I stopped breathing when he spread his large hand over my chest.

"Your heart is beating rapidly."

* * *

><p>Spartan Smile: Swiping two fingers across the faceplate.<p>

TITLE: Tall Enough for You?

CHAPTER: 3

* * *

><p>"Yes, and it's your fault," I said and looked up with a challenge in my eyes. I doubted he ever backed away from a challenge.<p>

Instead, he dropped his hands and stepped away. The vulnerability disappeared and his eyes became guarded and wary.

"I am not who you need. I... Good night, Commander Palmer."

Now, he's walking away from me to return to his demons and his grief alone.

"John?"

"I will not obey this order, Commander."

"It's not an order. It was never an order." I slipped on a pair of sweatpants and pullover while I tried to think of something to keep him from leaving. _Maybe I should just let him go_. At least, that's what I thought. What I said sounded like a plea, "Please don't leave. It was never about seduction, John. But if that's what we decide is right for us then it's fineâ€| more than fine."

His shoulders dropped and I heard him take a deep breath. That breath was not one of resignation but of finalityâ€"a stop of everything; a plea to just let him be.

But I wouldn't leave him to face his demons alone - with bravado and false courage gone I had blurted out the first thing I could think of. What was I saying? This didn't even sound like me. My brain didn't process them, but I meant them and I knew they were true.

I reached out to see if he would accept my touch. "When I watched you walk through the ship, something touched me. I don't know what to call it. I felt I...no; I _wanted_ to give you a quiet place to rest and find some peace. "

"You could have anyoneâ€|"

"No, John. I can't have just anyone. Any more than you can." Shipboard fraternization brought only trouble for senior crew. I knew he couldn't argue that point, just as I knew he had no use for my pity. This was a man who knew neither sentiment or sympathy. So why had I asked him here? With an idea of giving him some room, I started over with something so simple it couldn't spook him.

"I have coffee or whiskey if you prefer."

He shook his head, but made no further move toward the door.

"I wantâ€| I thought of asking for Cryosleep. She won't be there when I wake up."

Master Chief. My heart went out to him and stripped me of my own protective layers. All my bluster, sarcasm and the anxiety of this man in my quarters disappeared at his words. We'd lost peopleâ€"all of usâ€"but for a solitary figure like him, that loss must have been completely and utterly devastating.

"I want to forget. For that moment you spoke of."

I walked up behind him and slipped my arms around his waist. "Then lets give that to each other." Apparently, nothing I'd said up to that sentence meant more. Before I could even gasp in surprise, he'd turned in my arms and with the speed of his skills and training, my shirt disappeared. He watched in fascination as my breasts reacted to the cool air.

With all the training, missions and responsibilities, I actually hadn't been with that many men. How many? I'm not telling. So this slow exploration was incredibly erotic and yet strange. Like a place you knew how to get to, but forgot the process. Soon I wouldn't be able to stay on my feet. But he was still showing signs of bolting so I held my ground. And Spartans know how to hold their ground.

I just leaned in when he spread his hands over my breasts. Then reaching up on my toes I pulled his head down for a kiss. Was it more erotic to be kissed by a man who'd never in his memory kissed anyone? As he moved his mouth across my lips, I decided it was. Because he wasn't shoving his tongue in my mouth, biting my lips or sucking my face off to prove his mastery over me. He simply and gently tasted me -thoroughly studying textures and pressures. He compared my reaction to the difference in sucking my tongue into his mouth versus my lower lip and the texture of my tongue against his. The total focus on kissing me was as erotic as it was innocent.

Against my mouth, he whispered, "not finished," and dropped gracefully to his knees in front of me. Then he took up where his hands left off and continued exploring my torso with his hands and gentle kisses. I was tall, but he was taller and that put his face level with my chest. I was hoping he would...or maybe I was praying... Then he did and when he pulled my right breast into his mouth, words of encouragement flowed breathlessly from me. I almost didn't recognize the sound of my voice. Then he got the idea because he wrapped an arm around my waist and continued kissing and sucking his way across my chest.

A soldier becomes desensitized to pain and discomfort. A wound is ignored in favor of the mission requirements. Don't feel. Keep moving. Keep shooting. Stay alive. It's easy to forget and I had forgotten about the woman's flesh under my armor. As his mouth moved across my skin, he brought it to life again with every kiss and caress of his tongue.

"John... _Please_."

I rocked between the pressure of his mouth and the hands on my back. _Don't stop._ Suddenly, I dug my nails into his shoulders and shattered in a shower of sparks that began at my breasts, arched across to his lips, sparkled across my closed eyelids and ignited a path of fire straight down between my legs. When I could open my eyes I looked down into his. The corners were crinkled. Was he actually smiling? I think he looked a bit smug. Good for you Chief.

"John? I need to sit..."

"No."

And he turned his face against my stomach and went back to work. A Spartan on a mission is a beautiful thing and we could be particularly single-minded.

I suddenly worried what he would think of what he was about to find between my legs. Drenched and open, he might not find it...appealing. I guess he did because he was kissing me there just like he'd kissed my mouth. Exploring, testing and tasting...

I hissed his name as his tongue glided between the folds of my labia. And this wonderful generous man kneeling at my feet didn't require an anatomy lesson because he very quickly found all the right parts, or maybe I underestimated him and he knew about women. It didn't really matter, because this man was doing incredible things... and I was once again moving against him in complete and wild abandon.

When I came against his mouth the world went black. I might have fainted. I may have screamed. Were these rooms soundproofed? I hoped so, otherwise Fire team Majestic would be charging through the door any second. Crimson would follow to take pictures and fight over who really arrived on the scene first. Had I locked the door? Then I forgot all that when he let me slide boneless to the deck.

My fingers latched onto his shirt to stop myself from falling all the way to a mindless puddle on the floor. When I could think again â€" with the understanding this might prove a stopping point for him â€" I slowly pulled his shirt out of the fatigue pants. He didn't protest as I guided it up and away from his torso. The muscled chest and shoulders stopped my breath.

I had uncovered the gridlock of scars thrown in careless abandon over his torso. Some were jagged while others were the faded lines of his augmentation. There was fresh crimson bruising strewn all over his torso. The injuries and the scars only added to his allure and I wanted to touch each one, because this magnificent body begged to be touched - To be explored. I began with the bruises on his hands by kissing the augmentation scars gently. His right shoulder where he'd hung from the light bridge showed angry red in the darkness of my quarters. With my hands resting on his shoulders I ghosted my lips over the injured shoulder.

"I'll be careful, John."

He shook his head lifting my chin up, "Don't be."

There was no definition for the look in his eyes, but it melted my heart.

"Trust me?"

His answer was a hard kiss and I felt him shift impatiently against me. Okay, Master Chief. I'll quit wasting time. I unlaced his boots and he pushed them off. With my eyes on his face, I opened his fatigue pants. I whispered into his ear, "Your turn," and bit his earlobe. Then I slipped my hand deep inside. Just to stay on the side

of caution I kept my hand on the outside of his briefs. What I found there was burning with heat, hard and in need of serious attention. The scars, the magnificent, powerful torso, called to me both to protect him and raised a hunger in me powerful enough to wish I could sink my teeth into him.

Then to my complete yet delighted surprise, he turned my face up to his, "Tall enough for you?"

And I thought, _Oh you beautiful man._ You have a sense of humor. I get it now and I can keep up with you. With as serious a look on my face as I could manage I replied, "Well, that depends. There are other considerations than size," I replied, matching his tone.

"Commander, a training scenario requires a thorough coverage of the basics."

"I couldn't agree more," and slipped my hand inside his briefs and wrapped my fingers gently around his erection. When I pulled up, he followed the action and came up on his knees. Then he helped me push his pants down and off. Grabbing me by the waist he pulled me closer. I felt his arousal slip across my belly and I captured it again with my hand.

"No."

"Oh, yes. Just let me."

Then I grabbed his lips with mine again and continued to caress him with my hands. I reveled in the fact that no one had ever touched him like this. Cupping his testicles earned me my name spoken against my lips. While I congratulated myself on my skills at pleasing him, he suddenly picked me up and sat me down. I gasped as he filled me, every muscle in my body responding to the sudden intrusion.

It was perhaps a little more intense than he expected because when my butt rested on his thighs he threw back his head, then stifled himself immediately and hid his face against my shoulder. He didn't need to hide from me. Before I could say something, he pulled my legs out behind him and lifted me with his hands under my butt. His breath was quick and raspy; his eyes wild and maybe just a little bit uncertain. I wrapped my arms around his neck and hung on.

"It's okay. I've got you," I whispered softly.

So there we were on the floor of my cabin hanging on to each other as if there was nothing in the universe to come between us. And there wasn't because I wouldn't allow it. In fact, I'd fight it to the death. Because I realized I would do anything to give this man the peace he so deserved and the pleasure he'd been so long denied. He was silent as he found his own rhythm and continued thrusting into me. And I just held him close, kept him safe.

His movements brought me to orgasm again. He must have felt it building in meâ€"clever Spartanâ€"because suddenly he stopped moving and framed my head in his hands.

"Again?"

"Yes." I can hardly stay conscious and he's asking me questions. It was so guileless and endearing.

"Sarah...I want..."

All I could do was nod. What streamed through my head was, whatever you want... just ask... anything. Then he grabbed me again, not quite as gently as before and increased the tempo. He was so deep inside me, it was almost painful. But I held onto him. He was about to lose control and I wondered if he feared it. Then my orgasm struck, me pulling me down against his body. I heard his groan which almost sounded like pain. With his face buried against my neck his release pulsed and throbbed inside me.

Well, the fearless and feared Commander Palmer had tears in her eyes. He pulled back suddenly, luminous blue searching my face.

"Are you alright? Did I hurt you?" Worry had softened his voice and his grip loosened slightly.

"Oh, no, John. No."

He stood up carrying me in his arms and laid us both down on my bunk. He rose above me carding his fingers into my hair and kissing my cheeks, my eyes and lips.

"At peace?"

I shook my head and he frowned. "I have injured you. I apologize" "

"John, you've made me very happy."

The smile that lit up his face was worth a year's pay. He rolled us over to rest my head on his chest. A lovely wonderful place to rest your head. I was feeling very proprietary about this man and stretched my arms across him to hold him close.

"I should leave," he said quietly trying to sit up.

"I want you to stay," I said as I pressed his chest with my hands as if this could really hold him down.

"Is that an order, ma'am?"

I rose up and rested my chin on his chest to look at him. More humor? Delightful. "Do I need to make it an order, Master Chief?"

He shook his head and dropped back on the pillow. His hands stroked my back with warmth and comfort. "Perhaps I'll stay a while longer. At least, until I get my training evaluation."

Then I saw it. The devilish little-boy grin and I was the only one who knew about it. Of course, he was stronger than I. But just to make a point, I wrapped myself around him, as if meaning to pin him down, and with all the seriousness I could muster replied, "Trainee met or exceeded all requirements and expectations. Now we had better get some sleep. Those Covies aren't going to kill themselves you know."

His chuckle rumbled beneath my cheek as he turned us to our sides and looped an arm around me. I breathed in his unique scent once more and snuggled against him. Just before I drifted off, I heard him whisper, "Beautiful Sarah, thank you."

If one night could be this special. What would tomorrow bring?

4. Tall Enough For You? 4

TITLE: Tall Enough for You?

CHAPTER: 5

* * *

><p>I woke to the sound of someone in my bathroom. A glance at the chronometer reported 0200. I hadn't slept so deeply in years, so it took me several seconds of who and what to orient myself. I stretched and yawned and then it dawned on me and came back in one heart-flipping grin of memory. That wasn't just anyone in my bathroom that was the Master Chief. Last night he'd whispered against my neck imploring me to call him John. Although, I'd spoken his name several times, I understood that the invitation to call him by his given name was a gift.<p>

I also knew we'd shared something deeper than first names, or sexual pleasure. It was in the tenderness of the way he touched me, and the desire he allowed me see in his eyes. The way he trusted me enough to follow my lead. I fell back on the pillow with a profound sense of peace. What I had instigated between us last night left me sore and aching. The blush that crept up my neck told me we had come together for all the right reasons.

The water in the bathroom is shut off, causing my heart to leap into my throat. What should I do? Pretend to be asleep? Fluff his pillow? Brush my teeth? Comb my hair? I probably looked awful. What the hell? I should make him breakfast, at least. Right? I shoved my hair out of my eyes and realized the emotion making me gulp for air was nerves. Sarah Palmer, commander of the Spartan contingent on the UNSC flagship Infinity is unexpectedly shy.

Then suddenly the bathroom door opened and startled me so badly I jumped out of bed. I jumped out of my own bed! Now, it's the middle of the night, we're naked, in the middle of my quarters, having a staring contest.

"Master Chief?"

"Commander?"

"John?"

"Sarah?"

"Did you find everything you needed? I mean, do you need anything?"
Keep babbling, Palmer.

"Yes and no."

"Yes?"

"I found what I needed."

"And, no?"

"I have a question."

He's walking toward me, filling my vision with his muscular frame. But in the darkness of the room, I cannot see his eyes. Nerves make me cross my arms over my chest. He cocks his head weighing my actions against my stammer. We are both so new to this level of intimacy. The link between us is tenuous and I'm not sure I know how to make it right. What happened to my assurance this was the right thing? _Think, Palmer. Think of something._

"I'll leave now."

"Why?"

"You seem uncomfortable. Different."

"John, understand something. Yesterday, I intended to offer you comfort and ease your grief, if I could."

"Then you achieved your goal, Commander. We need never speak of this again."

"No!" I grabbed the clothes from his hands and threw them across the room. "Look." The hand I scrubbed through my hair was shaking. "I'm not exactly a veteran at having men in my quarters, Master Chief. It's easier to stay apart, stand aloneâ€¦ I'm lucky Tom and I built a friendship. But thisâ€¦ is so differentâ€¦ so much more. Please don't leave, John."

Faster than I could reach out to stop him from leaving he reached down with his hands and lifted me off the deck. My legs wrapped naturally around his waist and he held me in place with his hands on my butt. I must hang on to his neck to stay balanced.

I rubbed my nose against his and managed a coherent sentence over the sound of my heart ricocheting in my chest. "What's your question?"

"Last night, you said I only met, not exceeded, my training requirements. That is not acceptable."

"So you're interested in some remedial training?"

The humor and the easiness is back and I can see his eyes now. As I look down into his face, the innocent need shines up at me. The breathless sensation of something of tickling my bottom kick-starts something inside me and suddenly I want it all, again, _now_.

Before another word is spoken by either of us, I kissed his upturned mouth. When my tongue locks with him in a dance of passion and exploration. I dragged my nails up his back and she shivered. I wasn't gentle about it and the kiss wasn't tentative. It was a war of dominance. Seeking and searching, exploring new territories and recording sensations for future reference.

His body arched toward mine and he backed me against the bulkhead. But I had an idea, so before he could push me against the wall I attempted to twist away. His grip tightened and with his incredible strength, he pushed against me causing a friction that only increased my need for him. Then suddenly hot and hard he's inside me again. I wanted him to break me in half, to crawl inside me and never stop looking at me with those dark eyes.

The quiet violence of his actions and the angle of his penetration triggered an orgasm that curled my toes and left me gasping against the hard muscled shoulder. Still hard inside me he stopped moving while I caught my breath. When I could think again I twisted away before he could stop me I dropped to my feet and quickly reversed our positions. He called out my name when I shoved him hard against the bulkhead and his back slammed against it rattling everything in the room.

"When I said it was your turn, I meant it was your turn. I trust this time you will pay attention?"

He looked so damn good, watching me, quick breaths filling his massive rib cage and hands trying to gain some purchase on my shoulders. The way he grabbed at me, I think he wasn't sure if he wanted to pull me up or push me down. So to save him any embarrassment about asking for something he might not even be sure about I slid to my knees and made the decision for him.

When I wrapped my hand around him, he groaned. When I opened my mouth to take him in, he bucked against me so hard I almost fell backward.

Steady Chief.

I played this moment on instinct by listening to his reactions to the swirl of my tongue over the tip of...what I held in my hand fit no definition of the word 'tip'. The word phallus came to mind as I slid my lips firmly down over his erection. Locking my lips around him I pulled up and he shivered a groan. There really wasn't any word adequate to the task of describing this organ. Except perhaps to place a laurel wreath and fresh flower petals around its base. Yes, I thought as I enjoyed the sweet taste of him and his reaction to this intensely intimate moment.

Grabbing his butt in my hands I pulled him forward and he went deep into my mouth. Then pulled back leaving him bereft of my touch, to let the cold room air wash over him. With his hands fisted in my hair, I used just my tongue to swirl around the head and tease the pulsing vein on the underside.

Again and again, I forced him forward then pushed him back against the wall. He was hardly breathing now, just moaning incoherently. Every so often he said, no coupled with my name. I just ignored him, because, my love. The answer is yes. There's no turning back now.

This is my gift to you.

I braced myself and added my hand to what my mouth was doing. All my senses were involved with this experience of giving him this

pleasure. I tasted the sweat of his arousal and my own orgasm. The tangy salt of the precursor to his release. The curling hairs at the base of his erection tickled my nose. The utter maleness of him overwhelmed me. Nearly incoherent with the effort to stay upright, I allowed my instincts and his reactions to tell me how to move.

"Sarahâ€| "

His entire body curled, taut as a bowstring and arching toward me. Then in one groaning breath of sound he surrendered when his release flooded into my mouth.

And when it was over and he released me I crumpled to the deck and he followed me down. Sliding to his knees, he curled himself around me. I was so aroused myself, his fingers made quick work of me and brought me to climax. Before I slid into unconsciousness, I mentally added 'conscientious' to my list of Master Chief adjectives.

~o~

"Good morning, Commander Palmer. It's a fine Spartan day."

"What?" I mumbled struggling to awaken.

But John was already alert and slide his hand over my mouth. We were still on the floor. I recognized the sound of Roland's voice. Apparently, the ship's A.I. couldn't "see" us. But he very soon would.

"Commander Palmer, are you quite alright? Your heart rate jumped and your respiration...I detect more than one...two... Identity, Master Chief. Well..."

"Roland, get out of my quarters."

"Ma'am, you are late for your morning briefing with Captain Lasky. Just fulfilling my duties as assigned. I can hardly be faulted..."

"Get out of my quarters now, or I will personally pull every single one of your circuits myself and you'll be singing 'Daisy Bell' by the end of the day."

"Ah, movie reference, 1968, Stanley Kubrick. 2001, A Space Odyssey. The film explores the myths concerning the evolution of the human condition."

John unwound himself from around me and stood up, still naked, and walked toward Roland while the A.I. droned on.

"Originally panned by the critics it achieved cult status, the... appearance of a monolithic structure...Uh...Oh...Well, Master Chief!"

The Spartan's approach to Roland's holo-display could only be described as predatory.

"Threatening an A.I. construct violates several articles of UNSC as

well as civilian... I'll inform, the Skipper you are on your way!"

Once we were alone again, I hurried past John to the bathroom. He stopped me and pulled me into a hug. Then he opened a bottle of water and handed it to me.

Add 'thoughtful' to the list. I would need a second sheet of paper soon.

"Sarah, you know this is new to me. I will never forget what we shared last night. Now, go," he said softly and patted my bottom as I ducked into the bathroom.

When I came out, he was gone. The bed neatly made up. Clothes folded and stacked on the dresser. The towel from last night draped over the back of a chair. Neat, tidy and shipshape and utterly empty. I got the hell out of there.

Captain Lasky greeted me with a quick good morning and then stopped. Why is he staring at me? Two phrases popped into my head: Apparently, well-rested and well-fucked are written all over my face. The blush started in my belly and rose like a flame across my face. The Skipper is a gentleman and I know he wouldn't comment. So I sat down quickly, accessed my PADD and cleared my throat. When I looked down at the display, my hair swung forward.

Dammit. Breathe, Sarah. Breathe.

I cleared my throat again and jumped in. "My fire teams are on a rotating shore leave schedule. Based on predictions of the ship's time in port, I granted each team a twenty-four-hour window. They were instructed by the next team and may not leave until the preceding team reports in. The schedule commenced last night at 1800 with Team Majestic."

"Commander Palmer?"

I didn't dare look up at him and pressed on. "Are there any specific assignments or tasks you wish me to oversee while we're in port, Skipper?"

"Sarah?"

"Yes, sir?" I responded impatiently and for the first time met his eyes.

"Listen to me very carefully, Commander. I cannot order you to take leave. But there is one thing I can do. So let's make this official. Our briefing is concluded. The ship is squared away. All maintenance is on schedule. Ground crews are on board and working as of 0600. Now, with all due respect and my highest regard for you, go back to your quarters. Stow that uniform. Replace it with whatever you wish, as long as it doesn't have UNSC or Mjolnir stamped on it. Take whoever put that color in your cheeks and caused you to forget about your hair with you and get the hell off my ship. I don't want to see you or hear your voice for at least 48 hours. At which time you may check in via comlink. Do I make myself clear?"

Damn him. He's grinning at me like a Cheshire Cat. I'd be annoyed if

it were anyone but him. I'd probably shoot anyone else but him for making that comment. But I consider him a friend and damn that grin, he's seeing right through me. We have each other's back and our friendship apparently extends to moments like this. I trust that he only wishes me well.

Slowly standing, I gathered my personal items and forced myself to meet his eyes again, I felt like an FNG. But I just could not keep from sharing that smile with him. "Understood, sir. In which case, you should know, sir. The Master Chief will accompany me to Earth, sir."

His mouth opened. His mouth closed. He stood up and he sat back down. The grin returned in full force. "Noted, Commander. Dismissed."

* * *

><p>2001 a Space Odyssey: HAL singing Daisy Bell as he dies. youtube: HW_oMKGMQaU<p>

5. Tall Enough For You? 5

TITLE: Tall Enough For You?

CHAPTER: 4

AN: Just two more chapters. This was a fun story to write. Well, the first three chapters were fun. This last one was a bitch. Difficult to turn a sex romp into a real story. But, good writing practice. Right? A new full time job is taking away my free time. So, it's time to draw this story to a conclusion and Chapter 5 will be the final chapter. Thanks for all the reviews. I appreciate all of you who took the time to read the story and I'm glad you enjoyed it enough to add to your watch list.

Many thanks and Spartan Smiles to "Insaneblain" who fiercely wielded a The Mighty HALO Canon Sword over my head to keep me from going too fangirl over this chapter. Hey, wait a minute. I AM a fangirl. So I can hardly be blamed for wanting to get The Master Chief out of his armor.

Another thank you to "SwordsmanofShadows" and "Andrithir" for assistance with structure, and assorted wtf!? issues. This story began as one thing and needed to evolve into something else, you guys helped me make it happen. Btw, dear readers, go read their stuff too.

* * *

><p>The ride was quiet as we crossed the Great Plains. City after city swept past us as the Pelican raced to New Phoenix. Why that city, I wondered? Had the Composer aimed randomly? New Phoenix wasn't the largest or the most populated city. Was this thoughtless slaughter or the perfect size population for a test bed?<p>

We couldn't be sure what we'd find down there. The city was off limits to all but cleared personnel. Only relief parties and scientists investigating the incident were allowed in and even they went in escorted by assigned military personnel only. But I needed to

find my Spartan. As a just-in-case, Fire teams Majestic and Crimson were en route to New Phoenix for back up and escort.

We were seated in the very back of the aircraft. So the engine noise, consoles, and the weapons racks provided us with complete privacy. Both of us were too well trained to allow ourselves much of a romantic moment in a military situation. But everything was so new and fresh between us. The desire to affectionately tease him was very tempting. When the pilot reported over the radio we were an hour out of New Phoenix, I leaned over to the Master Chief, "John, I'm going to change clothes. Run interference for me?"

"Perhaps."

I waited until he opened his eyes. Then he looked at me earnestly and pitched his voice low, "You may take that off, only if you promise to wear again. Purple suits you."

With a hint of a smile around his eyes, he nodded me toward the back of the aircraft. I grabbed my bag and fished out a pair of jeans, boots, and a leather jacket. Instead of turning his back to allow me some privacy, he faced me. Waiting expectantly.

"So, you're gonna watch?" I ventured.

"Commander, a conscientious soldier never misses an opportunity to gain additional information about the mission objective... ." He stopped himself, looked around as if remembering where he was and replied, "No, Commander." And politely turned around.

"Hey, Master Chief," I replied quietly enough to get him to look at me. "I don't mind."

After I quickly changed clothes, we headed forward. But I did take a moment to surreptitiously run my hand down his arm as I passed. When my hand slipped over his, he gently squeezed my fingers. Then back to business, because when the pilot noticed me he pointed toward the view screen.

"Your Fire teams are here, ma'am."

The Pelican, with Fire Teams Majestic and Crimson aboard, dropped into formation beside us. Good. We're making progress and now that we're together, I was ready to deploy. Unfortunately, we were still a good forty-five minutes out and I'm not very patient when it comes to a mission. So pacing seemed like a good alternative. I didn't get very far, because Master Chief pulled me down into my chair after my second lap.

"I bet you're good at waiting." I commented, grudgingly crossing my arms over my chest.

"No. I'm not. My free time is spent in cryo sleep."

I thought about the last two days and all he'd been through. "For someone who's spent their career in cryo or fighting, you've experienced quite a bit of real life in the last forty-eight hours."

"Commander Palmer..."

I shook my head, "You don't have to say anything."

He filled up his lungs with air and gazed to a distant point only he could see. "Until I came aboard Infinity, Cortana was my only ally. She gave me advice, information and camaraderie. With you I learned things that an A.I., no matter how sophisticated, could not provide. You gave me something I would otherwise have never experienced."

He was looking at me now without reservation. "It had been a long time, John. Since...Well, I wanted to be with you, to comfort you if I possibly could."

"You did and so much more."

And then I blushed. He's looking right at me and I'm blushing. Didn't they train this out of us?

"Commander Palmer, are you losing your military bearing?"

Now he's teasing me and I grinned at him.

The pilot interrupted us. "Commander Palmer, I'm picking up an IFF tag signature. IDENT please?"

As I approached, the pilot pointed toward the ship's HUD. There was Thorne's IFF tag faithfully signaling his position. I was determined to retrieve him before any trouble started about his whereabouts. We had plenty of time to locate him before he's officially reported AWOL.

Master Chief stood at my shoulder. "It's him." I turned and nodded. "Lieutenant, execute a flyby. Then set us down close to that signal."

"Aye, Commander."

When the pilot nosed the aircraft down we saw the wide empty avenues. The vehicles stopped at a odd angles. At altitude the area appeared covered in snow. Of course, that wasn't possible. The particles were light enough that the Pelican's down draft sent it swirling in the dry desert air.

"Ready, Master Chief?"

His answer was to head aft and prepare the gear we planned to take down with us. Before following him, I observed the pilot and the flight officer exchange a grin. I already knew scuttlebutt claimed the Master Chief and I we were keeping company. Even a ship as large as Infinity had a gossip mill. Although it was generally believed - and certainly reinforced to the new troops - Master Chief chopped up Grunts and Jackals over his breakfast cereal. I knew no one had less than the highest respect and admiration for him. But I wanted to make a point.

"Something amusing, gentlemen?"

"No ma'am!"

After making eye contact with both of them, I headed to the back of

the Pelican to retrieve my gear. Master Chief handed me one of the two pistols kept as standard issued on a Pelican of this size. We both secured a com device to our ear and I grabbed a Boonie hat for each of us.

The Pelican finally bumped to a stop and we watched the other Pelican land next to us. When the engines quieted the flight officer lowered the ramp. Once we were clear of the Pelicans the pilots closed the ramps and secured the aircraft.

Majestic and Crimson silently joined us. No one spoke. Even DeMarco just nodded to me. It seemed disrespectful to speak. Like when you're in church or a funeral. Hoya handed over two ceramic and titanium ballistic vests and an assault rifle for each of us. After a signal from their team leaders, Majestic and Crimson fanned out around the Chief and me.

It was mid afternoon in this region. The city should have been bustling with the sounds of commuter traffic. Instead, the absolute silence of the once busy city was unsettling. We'd all seen the effects of the Covenant's glassing. The burnt bodies, etched like a shadow on the ground or wall where they died trying to escape. Shadows of people caught screaming in pain and fear as they died. Dead children lined up behind their teacher caught in the act of running for a shelter.

This was different, in fact, it's out-and-out spooky. Everywhere you looked your eyes expected to see movement. Even the sound of birds was absent in the dry chill of the empty streets. Beside me Master Chief shouldered a jacket over the ballistic vest and readied his weapon.

"Teams, time limit to find Thorne is three hours. More than that and we make Master Chief late for his meeting at HQ. So let's go find Mister Thorne and get out of here," I called out, breaking the eerie quiet. After a quick verification of the IFF tag signal and I waved my teams to move out.

We'd heard about this strange blue glow and the piles of dust represented what was left of a body once it'd been composed. As we moved down the street we got a closer look at the glowing particles scattered amidst the powder. However, time and wind had blown the neat piles around leaving streaks of glowing dust in the city streets. The detritus of a city brushed past us carried along by the wind as it moaned and wailed unrestricted around the tall buildings.

"What the hell is this stuff?" Hoya asked the pile of ash he stirred with his boot.

"It's what's left of the people after the Composer got through with them. Do you ever read the mission briefings, Hoya?" DeMarco, snarled. "At least show some fucking respect."

DeMarco looked at him in disgust and kept walking.

One of the Crimson team stepped close and whispered, "Hey Majestic, think there's any ghosts around here? Don't be scared, guys. Crimson's got your back."

"Yeah, more like their backs as they run away."

Crimson laughed. But a look from Master Chief silenced them and a second later I added, "Stow it. Stay alert."

The shadows deepened inside the city. The air grew heavy with the smell of sewage and stagnant water. The cloying smells made me wish for my armor.

Master Chief and I kept walking, matching the movements of the fire teams by turning side to side scanning the area. Beside me, I sensed a growing tension in Master Chief. His breathing so labored I could hear it. Almost like he was wheezing. I could tell he wanted to cough, but was trying not to give away our position. I could feel it too. Human dust particles were in the air, it was suffocating. Then suddenly he stopped and sneezed. His next inhalation brought a fit of coughing. I kept my eye on him. But when the coughing continued, held up my hand in a fist. We all stopped and I grabbed a bottle of water from his pack.

The water seemed to help. "You okay, Master Chief?" I asked him. It began to dawn on me that he was so accustomed to filtered air, this tainted air might affect him. Was I any less at risk?

"I'm a soldier," he countered quickly, after draining the bottle. His voice had an unexpected sharp tone to it. Then as if to confirm it, he seemed to catch himself and glanced at me, his brow furrowed. This is the first time we'd been in the field together, so I really didn't think much of it. He probably felt uncomfortable out in the open without his Mjolnir. I could empathize with that.

There was something irritating in the air. I was about to sneeze myself and I felt oddly agitated. "You picking up anything in the atmosphere?" I inquired of my teams.

"Negative for toxins in the air, Commander. We will continue to monitor. Ma'am? I don't suppose you'd consider waiting in the transport?"

The look I shot towards DeMarco gave him his answer.

"Understood, ma'am. Didn't think so."

"Commander, there is no value in exposing yourself to the possibility of a toxin. Perhaps you should return to the filtered air of the aircraft."

"I'd rather not do that, Master Chief," I returned, feeling my way just a bit and listening closely to the changes in his tone. Whatever concern I might have experienced from his reaction was forgotten when the scanner signaled we were within twenty-five meters of the IFF signal. We picked up the pace and Master Chief silently followed me. Another a short walk and located Thorne's helmet lying on the front seat of a burned out vehicle.

"Why is he in his armor when he's supposed to be on leave and why would he abandon a valuable and top secret piece of military equipment?" The Chief didn't comment, just attached the helmet to his belt. Then he turned his back toward me, silently following the Spartan armor boot-print of Thorne's tracks.

"Everyone sticks together." I ordered, before turning to follow the Spartan II.

My teams spread out in formation. The tracks left the street after about a mile and headed up a flight of stairs into a building. Why not a suburban area or to the apartment complex down the avenue? It was in the back of my mind that we might find him at his parent's home. So why an office building? But his tracks were plainly written in the dust. The door to the office building was open and we headed slowly in; watching our angles.

The air inside was thick and stale. Then right away heard someone call out. Slumped against the receptionist's desk we found an injured Marine. Another few minutes and he would have lost his battle with trying to breath over a sucking chest wound. I checked his vitals after Master Chief removed his helmet. We plugged the hole with Bio Foam and made him as comfortable as possible.

"Marine? Open your eyes. I need a sit rep."

His eyes opened and he flinched in pain. Oh, it's you. Commander Palmer, right?" Struggling to focus his eyes.

"That's right and two of my Fire Teams. What's going on here, Corporal?"

But he's coughing hard he can barely put a sentence together. Hoya got down behind him and helped him sit up.

"Sorry ma'am. We were sent down here to test the atmosphere and the piles of ash, search for survivors."

"Who attacked you?"

"Never saw them, ma'am. They were speaking English and using conventional weapons. I don't know where the rest of my team is. They were smart enough to disconnect our bio communications though. Just a bunch of looters or something else. But that's why there's been no report from us. Ma'am? I think they thought I was dead. Otherwise they would have finished me off. Could you check on my buddy. His last position was by the elevators."

DeMarco found the young man. He lay wide-eyed staring up the ceiling. "Lance Corporal Matthew Snyder. He's a member of one of the first recon teams to investigate after the Didact attack. But why? What could possibly have killed him?

One of the Crimson's team turned away. "Dead at nineteen. What a waste. We've got some varmint control to take care of gentlemen. Let's get to it."

They all nodded in agreement.

It was Tedra Grant from Majestic who noticed the odd manner in which the second young marine lay. She pointed at the floor. The young man's head lay at an odd angle from his body. "His throat was cut. No blood. _Bollocks_, she swore."

"So he was moved here? But why?" Hoya asked the group.

"To get our attention?"

Grant shook her head. "To warn us away. Anyone who saw two murdered Marines might think twice about a confrontation."

"I gotta confrontation right here." Crimson's team leader held up his rifle.

I instructed Hoya to call for a pick up on these two marines. Then we kept moving, following the tracks back outside and down a side street. Gradually we began to see evidence of vandalism. Smashed windows. Merchandise dragged into the street. As we rounded a corner we saw a gang of about twenty people. We paused and took position to observe the group. What we saw seemed like a typical group of looters. Then the answer to our question about the bio coms was answered when two police officers jumped out a window with a piece of equipment in their arms. This was nothing we couldn't handle. We would round them up and call for local law enforcement to pick them up. Or maybe I would shoot those two cops myself, just to make a point. Easy, Palmer.

Obviously struggling with his breathing now. Master Chief kept trying to clear his throat. His breath was coming out in raspy gasps. I could tell he wanted to cough, but was trying not to give away our position. I could feel it too. My chest felt tight and I needed to sneeze or at least catch a breath of fresh air. Each breath is painful and shallow.

Then one of the group shot another over a piece of junk. The crowd quickly escalated into violence. Screams of fear and gunfire echoed down the street. Master Chief seemed to respond to their outburst of violence and grabbed me. Before the teams could respond, Master Chief shouted at them to stand back. His hold on my arms was painful, but I ordered my teams to stand down.

"Disarm that crowd. I'm fine! Move!" They reluctantly moved away and repositioned themselves to take on the crowd.

Then Master Chief dragged me inside a nearby building.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing? Let me go."

But he was much stronger than I - another reason for me to hate that creepy bitch Halsey. I should've shot her twice - and lifted me off my feet. And backed me against a wall in a darkened office. The sounds from outside muffled by the dark rooms and shadowed spaces...

The sound of his breathing grew labored as the wheezing got deeper. Was I angry? Hell, yeah. He'd just compromised my authority in front of my men. But I managed to push down my growing hostility. "John," I said quietly. "Nothing is threatening us. The teams have that situation outside under control. It's just a bunch of looters."

But he didn't hear me. His grip on my shoulders tightened. The bite of his fingers beginning to tear at my skin.

"I won't let anything happen to you. I'll protect you. I swear."

"Hey, I appreciate the thought but I served twelve tours as an ODS. I can take care of myself."

He reached up, his hand almost a blur and pulled the Comm link from my ear. Shutting it off so it wouldn't send a signal and pinned me against the wall again. His eyes were wild and unfocused; his breathing labored.

"Then I'll just take what I want from you and be done."

This was so unlike anything I'd seen from him before. I replied in jest, attempting to ease the tension. "Don't make a girl a promise you can't keep." But my smile quickly faded as I watched him change again. With a sharp intake of breath, the hooded blue eyes turned icy. With a strangled cry he threw me down, as his emotions sprang to life. A sudden gust of cold wind came through the building, swirling around us and tossing dust against us. The need to clear my throat finally caught up with me. The coughing was painful. My lungs felt like they were on fire. The filthy air only aggravated our condition. But it was Master Chief who recovered first.

"You ridicule me? Throw Cortana's words back in my face?"

"Of course not, Master Chief. What's the point?"

"I was wrong to trust you. I could count on Cortana."

"She was programmed to be trustworthy, John!" That was an ugly thing to say. This damn dust!

"Would you like a demonstration of what I'm really capable of?"

Then he's on me, kissing me violently. His body weight crushing the air out of me. Breathing is impossible now. The dust floated in the air all around us. As I stared up at the ceiling, pondering if he were about to rape me and the possibility of his success, I watched the light glinting off it as it floated through motes of light.

His kiss was savage. It's a violence I'm all too aware of. After all, we live it every day. We maim and slaughter and risk our lives. Then, share a quick meal, grab some sleep and go back for more. Instead of apologizing for the words which set him off, I twined my arms around his neck and returned the kiss.

Plunging my tongue into his mouth, he responded by grinding his hips against me. I heard him keen deep in his chest. The emotion rumbled out of him. He tried to stop it by grinding his jaw closed. But it was too painful. The sound was heartbreaking, because it was the sound of anguish not desire and it quenched my growing passion.

I decide to try and gain his attention by calling him by something other than what she might have called him. I smoothed my hand over his face and head. "My love, tell me. Let me help."

He rolled off me and sat up. Master Chief let his head fall into his hands.

Before I let him answer, I radioed my teams. The looters were being rounded up and loaded onto transports. Law enforcement units from

nearby towns were en route and HAZMAT teams were mobilized. I told them to canvas the area and stay in touch. Master Chief and I were better off inside out of the dust.

"Good idea, Commander. We got the power turned back in your building. The air will clear soon."

"Good job, Hoya. Everything is copacetic. _Understood?_ Palmer out."

Behind me Master Chief spoke softly, "Commander Palmer...Sarah? Join me?"

I scooted closer to him and he lifted his right arm for me to slide up next to him. As intimate as we had been the other night before this was just a little strange. But the air was clear and I took a deep breath of fresh air. Something other than the dirty air had set him off. So I prepared myself to listen. With every breath the tension and hostility ebbed. By the time he began to speak again, I was drifting and enjoying the moment leaning against him. But I snapped awake at the sound of him quoting my earlier comment.

"'Don't make a girl a promise you can't keep.'"

I felt his breath hitch under my cheek. I tightened my hold on him and willed myself to silence.

"Halsey presented her to me like a gift. Something I should be grateful for. I wasn't and I resented the intrusion of her constant presence. She counted every heartbeat and listened to every breath. Later, she became my ally and companion. The key to every lock, and light on every dark path. The place to lean against when I was too exhausted to keep moving. Her vibrancy and intellect helped me contain the growing horror that I was the only one left. Used up. Alone."

"She is gone, because I couldn't save her. A few years ago, I had to leave her in order to complete a mission. I promised I'd be back. She said, don't make her a promise, I couldn't keep. But I kept it and I found her. On Requiem, when she couldn't hide the rampancy from me any longer, I promised to get her back to Halsey. She said those words again and I thought, I could do that. The Infinity was right there. I could save her this time too. Instead, she saved my life and sacrificed herself so that I could live. I failed to keep my promise. I failed her."

Revealed only by the tremor that passed through him and a quick gasp of breath. Something terrible broke free in him. There were no sounds of tears, but his grief and rage over the events leading up to her sacrifice resonated through him.

His anger over Del Rio's mistakes, and - it suddenly occurred to me - his feelings of inadequacy over his perceived inability to protect her left an anger in him that only time could dissipate. But I could be here for him and offer what sympathy he might accept. Those were probably the most words he'd said in his life. But he's gotten them out and with it the pain. I stayed quiet and gave him time.

For several moments, his body shook with reaction and when it was

finished with him, he sank back, spent. I felt it all, where I leaned against him, blinking back hot tears.

"I'm here for you."

In response, he tightened his arms around me. After a while he spoke again. "Why did you pick me, Sarah?" The question drifted quietly through the darkness.

"I had just made Lieutenant Commander when we heard about Forward Unto Dawn and The Arc. Everyone knew about the Master Chief, of course. Your losses, and your courage from that horror were the reason I entered the Spartan IV program. Jun-A226 recruited me, but you were the reason I joined. The bravest of all, the Spartan who never lost and always persevered." I had to laugh at myself and chuckled aloud. "I was such a kid then. All for guts and glory. Right?"

"I was MIA."

"Not to me. I knew somehow you'd survived. Then, there you were on Requiem. You saved us. You almost single handedly saved the largest ship in the fleet. You saved the flagship. I suppose they'll eventually have to create a new medal for you. Then you walked on board, like you'd just been out for a stroll in the jungle and I finally had the chance to meet you and all I could think of to say was something smart-ass. Anyway, after you destroyed Didact's ship and you walked passed us. I saw the fatigue and the grief. I wanted to make you stop right there and reassure you everything would be all right."

"Master Chief's reputation, the armor, Halsey's propaganda, that's all it was.." He replied, as if that explained everything. I noticed he described himself in third person.

"It's possible you could have convinced me of that before. But not after spending that night with you. Experiencing your strength and passion."

"Sarah, I want to tell you. But I don't know - "

"- You are a Spartan, a soldier who speaks with his actions, not his words. But you are also a man, correct?"

"A fact you reminded me of."

"I'd say that went both ways. So stop worrying about what you should say or what words you should use and just say whatever you need to say."

"Then, Sarah. Come here, now...I want to feel everything."

The sound of weapons fire broke us apart. A spray of assault rifle fire appeared on the wall just above our heads. Pieces of wall crumbled down on us.

"Nice and easy. Let go of the pretty lady and sit up. Don't try to stand and keep your hands where I can see them. After that confession I'm pretty sure she'd be upset about it you being killed. That was a real nice story."

"Thorne?"

I rolled to my feet to confirm the identity of the voice. I sidestepped the sweep of the Master Chief's arm as he tried to stop me. The young man's face was sunburned; lips blistered and swollen. Those brown eyes I often admired shot through with the hard glint of someone who'd found the edge of their sanity.

I put as much warmth into my voice as possible. I needed to get his attention. I knew Master Chief was fast enough to disarm him. But I wanted to try another way and I help up my hand to stay his movement.

"Hi Gabriel. How's it going?"

"Commander Palmer! I didn't realize..." He pulled himself to attention. "Ma'am, I apologize. Master Chief please stand, if you wish...Of course, standâ€¦ I..."

Master Chief stood slowly and we exchanged a look. He nodded to show he understood. Of course, we could have disarmed him. But, this young man had been through enough. Master Chief held out his hand, "The weapon?"

Thorne couldn't hear him. He was still lost in his terror. "I-I was guarding the city. It was the least I could do. I killed three of them. They were killing the Marines. I had to stop them. They were fighting over things that didn't belong to them. I'm sorry...I tried...Everyone is gone." Grief bubbled around his words, as he sank exhausted to his knees. "They killed my family... My little sister... My parents...Everyone's parents. We're all orphans nowâ€¦"

"The _hell_ you say." That was Hoya's deep voice.

"Gab, you're no orphan." Then out of the darkness walked Fireteam Majestic. Tedra Grant knelt down beside him and put her arm around him. She bent her head toward him and apparently said something he liked, because he grinned up at her. DeMarco dropped a hand to the young man's shoulder, while Madsen quietly slipped the assault rifle out of Thorne's grasp.

"That's enough talk about being alone, Gab." Thorne shot DeMarco a grateful glance. Then Majestic's team leader joined the Master Chief and me.

"Okay if we take him home, ma'am?"

"Yes, but drop him off at the Infirmary. No home remedies having to do with alcohol. That's an order."

"Yes, Commander. Local law enforcement is taking control of the city. They're gathering up as much of this dust as they can. They said someday soon there will be a mass burial and a ceremony. There's a storm blowing in. I think you'd find fresher air outside, Commander."

The Fire Teams took Thorne back to Infinity and Master Chief and I boarded the other Pelican. Once we were in the air, I leaned my head back against the seat. We didn't speak, but there were things I

wanted to say.

"Chief...John. It's okay to admit that you loved her." You relied on her. She was your partner in the purest sense. Was her death meaningless?"

"No."

"Neither was how you felt about her. She sacrificed herself to save you. You would have done the same for her. That's why I approached you that night. I couldn't replace her, but I could at least give you some comfort; a place to rest."

"You didâ€|"

"You think no one else can possibly understand or accept you the way she did."

He didn't answer.

"Then tell me who that man was who spent the night with me?"

"I'm not sure I know him."

He was generous and gentle. John, I'm not asking for anything more from you than the truth."

"What is the truth? I lost track of it."

"Roland said, when the Librarian changed you, whatever she did to you also destroyed your pituitary implant - didn't anyone discuss that with?"

"No, no one. So emotions...what I feel for you. The rage that eats at me and the grief I cannot control...Don't look at me."

He was unbuckling his seatbelt to move away. I didn't want to lose the moment or lose him. "Tell me about her, John. Was she as remarkable as they say?"

He fell back in the seat, "Yes, sassy and brilliant. Alternated between treating me like her kid brother and a friend. Sometimes, I simply followed her lead. Then when she needed me most I couldn't save herâ€| couldn't even touch her. She was everything positive to me in a world filled with savagery."

"Perhaps in time you could learn to allow other meaningful things into your life."

"Like you?"

"Only if that is what you want. I will not press you for anything you do not wish to give or share freely."

"I've overheard other men talk about the women in their lives - many times I heard disparaging and disrespectful remarks. Complaints about personal situations which are no one's business."

"I hear them too, John. But I am not one those women."

"No you are not. We are Spartans, we stand alone and that is as it should be."

6. Tall Enough For You? 6

TITLE: Tall Enough For You?

CHAPTER: 5

FANDOME: HALO

AN: ACK! A reviewer just reminded me of something I meant to do and forgot. The uniform insignia MC gives to the young boy is a combination out of my imagination of the traditional Navy Seal Trident and a Special Forces design.

Apologies in advance for changing POV. I indicated the change like this: ~o~

* * *

><p>The times are tough now, just getting tougher

This old world is rough, it's just getting rougher

Cover me, come on baby, cover me

Well I'm looking for a lover who will come on in and cover me

* * *

><p>As if I needed to be reminded of my place. But I got the message and it stung.<p>

"My mistake," I muttered and leaned back in the seat, squeezing my eyes closed. Don't feel, move, fight, live. Every Spartan's mantra. Admit it Palmer, you made 'the mistake' by getting involved, by caring, by opening yourself to feelings. As a Spartan, it's always a bad idea, always was and always will be.

I was pretty good at distracting myself from discomfort. To distance thoughts from the Master Chief's words, I recited the ODST launch checklist to myself.

Check harness

Secure Helmet

Check oxygen flow

Green light team

Listen for go countdown

Tuck

Launch

It wasn't working...

Free fall

Bury your feelings, numb your heart, don't feel, don't think, follow the Spartan in front of you. Move!

Pacing. The pacing was a nervous habit from the early days of my career. Loved the feeling of free fall, hated the waiting. Thirty steps to the cockpit, thirty steps to the latrine. The Master Chief gave a slight snore as I passed him. His hands were open and relaxed at his side. How dare he sleep while I'm pacing, I could shout, Incoming! as I walked passed. I can do a pretty good impression of a Grunt (such are the talents you learn as a Hell Jumper). That would wake him up.

My electroless nickel finish, consecutive serial number, matched pair of M6H Magnum handguns lay holstered on the seat. I could just shoot him. Then I'd engrave his name on the barrel "I dropped into the nearest seat.

He didn't have the faintest idea of the implications of what he'd just said. I told myself all along we might have only a moment of time. We are Spartans. So I would follow his lead. There was no blame to lay at his feet or hurt feelings for me to claim. Get over it, Palmer. The time has past.

In order for him to take back control of his emotions and his intellect, he would shut down again. What could I do to earn just a moment more? Nothing. I had to honor his decision and after what happened down in New Phoenix, I really couldn't blame him. So I grabbed a blanket and stretched out over the empty seats. Sleep finally claimed me while troubled dreams of intense blue eyes studying my face for reaction, while strong hands roamed over my body, kept me from genuinely resting. John. I mean you no harm

~o~

Across the aisle, John-117 opened his eyes to the gloom of a darkened cabin. His hand swept over empty space, reaching for the woman next to him. With a start at his lapse he sat up straight and scanned the cabin with keen eyes. There she was. A bit of reddish-brown hair escaped from a blanket wrapped around a feminine form. A pale hand gripped the edge to keep her head covered. For a long time he just stared at her hand. A hand capable of much violence, efficient killing and yet when she touched him it had been with a gentleness unknown to him.

The flight officer appeared out of the shadows and knelt down next to him. "We're almost to HQ, Master Chief. I need her sitting upright and strapped in."

"Understood."

The officer turned to leave, then stopped and turned back to the Spartan. He began to speak with a Southern accent. That drawl which aircrew had adopted hundreds of years before, from the test pilot, Chuck Yeager, "Ain't none of my business, Master Chief, but between you and me, she's a keeper. That's all I'm saying."

'A keeper?' His mind searched for a definition, while he stretched out his hand to the sleeping woman's shoulder. No, he shouldn't touch her. Not now, not ever again. His priority is regaining control over himself. Whether the implants were destroyed or not, didn't matter. He was still responsible for his actions. He had a meeting to attend and duties to perform. Later, although he had no idea where they might send him, there would be more missions and for that he needed a clear head and no distractions.

"Commander Palmer?"

So instead of reaching out to touch her shoulder like he planned. He simply called her named. His right hand opened and closed. He wanted to touch her.

She turned her face toward him to study him with guarded eyes.

"We are about to land, ma'am."

He watched her slowly rise without looking at him and carefully folded the blanket, turning pointedly away to stow it in a bin.

He might not understand what had changed, but something definitely had. In his experience most things explained themselves if you stayed silent and watched. So that is what he did.

She ran her fingers through her hair, he imagined to smooth it out, but it only made it worse. She straightened her clothes and buckled the seat belt. Commander Palmer kept her eyes on the bulkhead in front of her.

Once the Pelican was on the ground and taxiing in, she finally spoke, "Master Chief, did you intend on going back to Infinity immediately after the meeting?"

"Originally, but..."

"Okay, I'll just find something to do. Have the pilot call me or you call me, when it's time to leave."

And just like that, he understood Commander Palmer no longer wished to spend time with him. Perhaps she would meet with friends? After all she was a high ranking officer. She had friends, and contacts to meet with. Perhaps even a young man...No, he wouldn't let himself think that.

The ramp lowered and the two Spartans left silently and went their separate ways. The flight officer shot a glance at the pilot who shrugged his shoulders. "Come on, I'll buy you some breakfast."

~o~

The Master Chief stood alone beneath the blossoming cherry trees. The Jefferson Memorial stood across the Potomac framed in the branches. The meeting ended two hours ago, but he still wore his dress uniform. The pathways beneath the trees were quiet at this time of the morning. The tourists were not out yet. He walked slowly, head down and hands locked behind his back. He had a lot to think about.

They had offered him retirement by couching it words of sympathy and well wishes. Retirement? He didn't even know what that word meant. There'd been no 'or' either. No retire or go here, or take this assignment or take this teaching job. He'd worn this uniform all of this life. Cortana.

"Excuse me, sir?"

A young voice distracted him from his spiraling thoughts. A boy waited patiently for the man who towered over him to respond.

"My I help you?"

"Are you a Spartan?"

Even sinking down on one knee, the top of the boy's head barely reached his chest. "I'm not supposed to talk about that. Are you cleared for classified information?" The Master Chief asked conspiratorially.

"My father is a Marine," the young man stated proudly.

"Then you are cleared. Yes, I am a Spartan."

"Thank you, sir. I knew you were, 'cause my Dad told me all about you guys. Maybe you know my Dad?"

"What's his name?"

"Gunnery Sergeant John Mackie, sir"

Master Chief looked up at the boy's mother. She shook her head with tears in her eyes.

"Maybe you saw him...before he was killed?"

"I think I remember him now. He was very brave that day. I remember he was talking about his son. Was that you?"

The young boy nodded his head enthusiastically.

"Why don't you take this?" Master Chief removed his Special Forces Trident insignia from his uniform and pinned it to the boy's t-shirt.

"Wow! Thank you!"

"How old are you?"

His Mom answered, "He's seven and can't wait to grow up and be a Marine."

"Will you work hard at becoming the kind of man your Father hoped you'd be? Do well in school and listen to your Mom? Before all that I want you to promise me you'll enjoy your childhood. Have fun and learn something new everyday"

"Y-yes, sir." The young boy's face crumpled and he threw himself against the Master Chief. Master Chief slowly slid his arms around the child.

The child showed great courage but there were limits. The Spartan recognized the child's grief. He'd known it too. It's too hard to watch people you care about die. When you just wish everything would just stop, the sun keeps coming up and another day dawns. Then another day and another. In a few days you recognize that you can get through more than just a few minutes without thinking about them and the healing begins.

"It's hard to lose someoneâ€¦ someone you love. I think we have to go on for them and live the life they would have wanted for us. Do you think your Father would have wanted you and your Mom to be happy?" Master Chief murmured quietly.

"Yes, sir. Did someone you love die too?"

"Yes."

"How did you get over it, sir?"

"I don't know that I have. But there are people in my lifeâ€"he looked up at Commander Palmer, who'd been standing there for several minutesâ€"who are willing to be patient and understanding. I think you have to learn to accept friendship when it's offered to you."

"Is that who you mean?" The child gestured over the Chief's shoulder and wiped his eyes on his sleeve. "She's very pretty, sir."

"Yes and she's a Spartan too."

The boy turned back and said, "I think you'd better go over to her, before a Marine comes along and steals her from you. My Father always said, there wasn't a girl alive who could resist a Marine in his uniform."

Master Chief laughed. "Is that so? Well, then. I'd better do what you suggest. I'm glad to have met you. You and your Mom take good care of each other, okay?"

"Aye, aye, Spartan, sir!"

~o~

Commander Palmer hadn't actually been looking for him, just walking and enjoying the vibrant colors of the cherry blossoms and the spring morning. Washington DC was beautiful in the Spring. She stayed until the Mother and son were gone around the bend of the path.

"You did wonderfully with that little boy. But, I'll let you get back to your walk, Master Chief."

"Wait. Walk with me?" He asked holding out his arm for her to take. He had no idea where he'd learned that gesture, but it seemed appropriate. It was a long minute before she took the offered arm. Without speaking, the tall soldier, immaculately attired in his dress uniform, tucked the arm of his companion, a strikingly powerful and beautiful woman, into his.

The beautiful morning brightened as birds began to hunt for breakfast

among the pink and white blossoms scattered beneath the trees. Master Chief noticed how the sun brought out the red in Sarah's hair. The resplendent colors around him were so unusual, he felt the weight of his thoughts lifting. A few feet away, a female duck conducted her small family to breakfast. The couple paused to watch.

"A simple uncomplicated life," Palmer noted with a deep inhalation of morning air.

"Sarah? I am unaccustomed to apologizing. Especially when I'm not sure what I might have done. But if I had anything to do with your sudden change of mood - your unhappiness - allow me to make amends."

"How could I be unhappy in this beautiful setting with a handsome soldier about to kiss me."

"Is he?" His thumb rubbed over her bottom lip and staring intently into her face. "He doesn't want anything to cause you unhappiness, especially if it's his own social clumsiness."

"Don't you say that." She pulled his head down, but waited for him to make the first move toward kissing her.

Master Chief brushed his lips across hers. She captured his face with both hands and bending her head back invited him to deepen the kiss. In between their tentative kisses she asked, "I thought you wanted to stop this between us?"

"I was wrong" "I want to live."

"I like the sound of that. Now come back down here."

"Yes, ma'am." He slanted his mouth over hers and delved his tongue into her mouth for a quick taste. Her reaction was immediate. Master Chief pulled her closer, whispering words of endearment into her ears. The continued to kiss and speak quietly, until the time came to make a decision. After all, they were adults not teenagers.

"I believe the phrase is, 'My place or yours?'" Her happy smile was answer enough, but doubt still lingered. "Will you come with me, Sarah?"

"Of course."

All heads turned as the tall handsome couple crossed the hotel lobby. The Spartans did not hold hands or indulge in any public displays of affection. But when Master Chief opened the door to his room she was already loosening his collar. This was still so unusual to be touched...to be desired.

His uniform went carefully back into the garment bag. Naked, he turned back to her only to find she is staring at him intently. Unexpectedly, he felt shy.

"I have many scars," rubbing his hand absent mindedly over his torso.

Her eyes widened as she followed the movement of his hand over the rippling abs. The only word she could speak with the breath left in

her throat was, "No!"

Bending her head, she kissed the scars, paying special attention to the bruises on his rib cage. "Don't say that about yourself. You're beautiful."

He snorted with laughter. "You're teasing me."

While she proved she wasn't teasing him with her feather light kisses to his torso, he discovered the texture of her sweater. He liked the feel of it against her skin. He wondered...he pushed her bra aside. The soft fabric molded perfectly over her breasts and she answered with her teeth sinking into his pectoral muscle.

Her nipples hardened under his hands. Perhaps if he rubbedâ€|? Yes, she reacted by strongly sucking his nipple into her mouth. He practically came up on his toes...he hadn't known...didn't realize. Her teeth grazed over him again. Master Chief wanted that to happen again... and again...and harder...

She got the idea when he pressed her face to his chest.
"Sarahâ€|?"

The Master Chief for whom the smallest detail could mean the difference between survival or mission failure, continued to study the effect of gently pinching her nipples between his thumb and forefinger and how much pressure yielded a sound of pleasure from her.

Without moving her mouth from his chest, she moved his hands to her skirt and showed him how to release the buttons. It fell to her ankles and his fingers encountered a new sensation. The soft silky slide of his fingertips across her lacy panties. His instincts took over for him, for he was helpless now to resist the ancient drives. He filled his hands with the firm cheeks of her ass and hauled her against him. The aftershock of the impact of her hips against his groin brought them both up for air.

Master Chief hesitated for a moment, but Commander Palmer did not and she back them both up to the bed and pulled him down with her.

"I want you now!" And he ripped away the lacy fabric and was inside her before she landed on the mattress.

The intensity of their joining and the euphoria associated with reconnecting made them oblivious to the motion of the bed as it surrendered to gravity and the combined weight of the two Spartans. John did remember to stop himself from completely crushing Sarah by landing on his forearms. That was soon forgotten when she tipped her hips up and wrapped her legs around his waist.

Master Chief ground his teeth together. This was very different than the first time. He was buried inside her. He had to move. The first time he drew back and his hips pushed against her pubic bone he felt his control slipping away. He would take her now, mark her somehow, he would never let her go. He couldn't have stopped now if a pair of Hunters walked into the room. Well, if his magnum was laying right there, he could get a shot off...

This was also going much faster than the first time. The pliant body

beneath him spread herself to take as much of him in as possible. She was touching him with gentle hands. Encouraging him and saying words he'd never heard before. Sweet kisses that tingled on his skin.

"John!" she sighed, kissing his face and sweeping her hands across his torso and down over his butt and gripping the firm muscles.

"...beautiful." Nothing could touch him in his armor. Years spent in isolation, separated from everything and everyone around him. Now here he was naked and exposed and vulnerable. She called him her love. She'd promised to keep him safe. Tears stung his eyes. A fire banked for too long flared to life. Pulling every drop of blood and every thought to the point of their joining.

How could other men joke about this? It was more than he could take, but he couldn't stop. His last conscious thought was Sarah wrapping her Spartan-strong arms and legs around him so he was surrounded by her sweetness. When the release came he gripped her and pushed one last time as he poured himself into her in pulsing waves.

Sarah Palmer lay beneath John reveling in the experience of this moment. That he trusted her enough to allow this humbled her. Kissing his cheek she listened to his breathe as it slowed. Maybe this would never end, maybe they could just stay like this forever. But even if they could as he relaxed against her, breathing became almost impossible.

"John?"

"Hmm?"

"I can't breath."

He mumbled against her ear. "I guess they're not training Spartans like they used to...too bad, really."

"Well, at least we're not made out of some old fashioned metal. Like iron, maybe? You are so heavy! Move. Please."

"Lowers the standard for all of us..."

"You think I can't push you off me, Mister Big-Shot Spartan two?"

"Spartan four's are really not the same caliber..." he did however lift some of his weight off her. And that was a mistake because in favor of gentlemanly behavior his movement gave her just enough room to slide her legs under him. Now the strongest part of her body was under the Master Chief's center of gravity.

Before his look of you wouldn't dare faded, he was neatly flipped off the bed. He turned in mid-air and before his back hit the carpet he was back on his feet. Sarah laughed as she faced him from the other side of the bed. He had strength, but she had maneuverability.

"I will catch you, Sarah. Do not underestimate me."

"I'd say it's you who will underestimate me."

He was magnificent to look at, all muscle and brawn and raw power. It caused even a senior Spartan on board the the largest ship in the fleet weak in the knees to see him like this.

This was simply a matter of trajectories and leverage. She was grinning at him, watching him and trying to guess which way he might move. In a moment he would catch her and he knew just what he would do when she was back in his arms. He didn't think she would mind losing this battle.

She was playing, a skillset the Master Chief hadn't actually learned yet. But he had no intention of losing this battle so when he fainted right she dodged left. While she laughed, he reached across the bed and grabbed the hand nearest him. The momentum yanked her directly off her feet and into his arms. So that when she completed the turn he grabbed her other hand and followed her body down, allowing the momentum to pull him down on top of her. With her legs spread under his chest and her hands captured in each of his, she was trapped.

Master Chief rested his head on her stomach and congratulated himself on a perfectly executed take down.

"John, you'll pay for this."

"Threatening a Spartan? May I work off my fine?"

"What are you talking about?"

She hadn't seen John lift his head and place a kiss on the soft curls between her legs. Her whole body jerked in response.

"Wait John Oh"

Slowly, so slowly she impatiently tried to raise up off the bed to lift herself up to him, he eased his mouth down over her again and slipped his tongue between the folds. As he thought she might be, she was still very aroused. That he was tasting the effects of their initial release aroused him further. But first, he would make sure she found what she needed. The taste was erotic and intensely sexual. Her writhing body beneath his brought him to painful erection against the mattress and demanded attention. But it would have to wait because she was calling out to him.

She chanted his name, while he kissed her deeply and worked his tongue over her clit. So many sensitive areas to test. He'd released her hands by now and she grabbed his head.

"John, stay don't move please...Don't stop. Right there...Oh, J-J-John Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."

* * *

><p>John Freeman Mackie (October 1, 1835–June 18, 1910) was a United States Marine and a recipient of America's highest military decoration—the Medal of Honor—for his actions in the American Civil War. He was the first Marine to receive the Medal of Honor: wikiJohn_F._Mackie

...

The times are tough now, just getting tougher
This old world is rough, it's just getting rougher
Cover me, come on baby, cover me
Well I'm looking for a lover who will come on in and cover
me
Promise me baby you won't let them find us
Hold me in your arms, let's let our love blind us
Cover me, shut the door and cover me
Well I'm looking for a lover who will come on in and cover
me
Outside's the rain, the driving snow
I can hear the wild wind blowing
Turn out the light, bolt the door
I ain't going out there no more
This whole world is out there just trying to score
I've seen enough I don't want to see any more,
Cover me, come on and cover me
I'm looking for a lover who will come on in and cover me
Looking for a lover who will come on in and cover me
-Bruce Springsteen
/ watch?v=-Gt-AXkolE8

7. Tall Enough For You? 7

TITLE: Tall Enough for You

CHAPTER: 6

AN: I'll apologize up front for this. I have to finish this story, my new full time job leaves me almost no energy for writing. So for better or worse it's done. Thank you for the reads and reviews.

* * *

><p>I get so tired

Working so hard for our survival

I look to the time with you

To keep me awake and alive

* * *

><p>We hadn't even had time to stow our gear when the Skipper ordered us to report to his day cabin.<p>

Report? We exchanged a look. What could have happened during the short while we were on leave? Reporting-in meant uniforms and protocol and military bearing. We parted ways to change into our uniforms.

Afterwards we met outside Captain Lasky's day cabin. Where to my surprise, he kept us waiting for a several minutes.

"Think we're in trouble?"

He raised his eyebrows at me and shrugged his shoulders. "That will prove a novelty. I've never been in trouble."

"Show off."

"Spartan IVs are prone to trouble. It's in your service records. A regular pattern of violent and mischievous behavior."

"And you've read them all, including mine?" I asked becoming more annoyed by the second. I know he's teasing me. But what the hell is Lasky up to?

"I don't need to read yours, I already know everything about you."

I crossed my arms over my chest and dared him to go on.

You prefer vanilla over chocolate. A preference I cannot comprehend. Your favorite color is the current color of my eyes. You prefer pistols to long range weapons and you have a tiny series of moles which point the way toâ€|"

"Master Chief. About that trouble you've never been in?"

"And you're ticklishâ€|"

"Stop right thereâ€|"

Then Roland called us in.

Before we entered I mouthed a thank you to him. His teasing had the effect he desired and caused me to relax. We entered together and came to attention in front of the Captain Lasky's desk.

"Commander Palmer, reporting as ordered, sir!"

"Master Chief Petty Officer Sierra-117 reporting as ordered sir."

Flawless salutes and flawless uniforms didn't give him a reason to invite us to to take parade rest or at ease. We were in trouble.

"Master Chief, do you have any idea how much a king size mattress and box springs costs? Of course you don't."

He turned to me, his eyes boring holes in my skull.

"Commander Palmer, do you know how much a custom designed etched glass shower door costs to replace?"

I took a chance and glanced down at the paper in his hands. I recognized the logo of John's hotel immediately.

"Are you in the position of attention, Commander?"

Dammit, he caught me looking. "Yes, sir!"

The captain began to pace. "Do either of you know how many security protocols were broken by allowing this to happen and for this bill to be sent to _MY SHIP_? Oh, and I can't forget to give you this letter, Master Chief. From a young man who addressed it to the 'Master Chief Petty Officer Spartan who lives on the UNSC Infinity and his pretty lady friend.'"

"Sir...if I could just explainâ€¦"

"Commander Palmer, I think I have a pretty good imagination. Perhaps not as adventurous as you two. But I don't require an explanation. What I will do is hand this bill over to you, Commander. I don't care how you do it, but between the two of you get this mess paid for. Am I clear?"

AN: I just made a spontaneous, unconscious flying change of POV right hereâ€¦ I'm not changing it though. You'll hang with me won't you?

"Aye, sir!" Their response came out in unison.

"Commander, you are dismissed to duty. Master Chief, please stay behind for a few moments." Indicating a chair for the Spartan to sit down.

The Master Chief accepted the chair but kept his eyes averted.

"Nice work, John. You got the prettiest girl in school."

"The prettiestâ€¦? Oh, I didn't get the...Now I doâ€¦" their eyes met and they exchanged a smile. But the Spartan couldn't hold it long and averted his eyes again. He'd never imagined a scenario like this. That he had shared such intimacies with Sarah and now they were back on duty and Captain Lasky knew...was most disconcerting.

"Master Chief, I know what went on in that meeting you attended. Do you want to retire? Are you ready for that?"

"No sir. Didn't seem as if I had a choice."

"You do have a choice. Would you like to stay here on the Infinity?"

~o~

When it ended we had ten months together.

John enjoyed his time on the Infinity. They made him my NCOIC and he took right to the training and teaching. He revamped the training, by making it tougher and more complicated. The other Spartan's idolized him and they never tired of competing with him or asking him questions and he never seemed to tire of answering. He always took the time to explain a tactic or demonstrate a fighting move. In the evenings they'd gather round him in the galley to get him to talk about his adventures.

Remember, no one had ever asked John about those missions before. No one ever asked him if he were okay. A Flight Surgeon never asked, "How are you feeling? Do you need to talk about anything?"

Suddenly, everyone from the old timers to the NUBS were interested in him. I know he enjoyed sharing what he knew and his experiences. I know because he shared those thoughts with me. So in the same way we had become good friends and then lovers, as a command team we did good things together. I was proud of him and my Fire Teams.

Even Majestic followed Master Chief's every word and styled themselves as his protegees. Always competitive they fashioned a scoring sheet to track everyone's progress. I didn't stop it, by competing with each other to be better than John they were sharpening their own skills.

The younger Spartans also enjoyed sparring matches. Master Chief quickly became the Infinity's top hand to hand specialist. No one could match John's speed or reach. Not that they didn't try.

It was during this time that his relationship with other crew members deepened as well. He'd known the Skipper from Corbulo Academy. Time and war had kept them from getting to know each other. But now that Thomas was an adult, they seemed to share a special bond.

The time we spent together deepened and grew more significant every day. You're wondering how the two of us maintained a relationship through the stress and monotony of shipboard life. Through missions and endless training. How could two competitive Spartans with egos to match not drive each other crazy? What happened after the passion cooled?

Don't forget this situation relatively new to both of us. Also, Spartan's are never too tired, never not up for a challenge and always competitive. Those attributes only fueled the passion.

But there were little things too. Like making sure my favorite coffee was always available. These were the small things which cemented our relationship and no one else saw. I made sure he felt loved and accepted into ship life and into the crew. At night, I left him in no doubt of my feelings for him. But I had not as yet put a name to them. I simply showed them in my behavior toward him. Good times.

Then one evening the Captain summoned us to his quarters. Not his day cabin, not his briefing room, but his private quarters.

"Sit down you two."

A drink landed in front of each of us.

Something is wrong. His body language told the tale. But what had happened? What could have happened that hasn't happened already. If we could work through my shooting Halsey and her subsequent disappearance then we were solid or so I thought.

While Lasky shuffled through the data he wouldn't even look at us.

"We intercepted a signal. Not much more than irregular pings. But they are aimed at this ship. And most of it is standard SOS.

Next to me I heard John's breath catch.

"The comm folks and Roland have confirmed the location...Some kind of odd desert planet. It is possible based on...

He was standing now and turning toward the door.

"John, wait. Please. We haven't confirmed the source or the identity of the sender. But Roland believes it's...Cortana's signature."

He was out the door.

The Skipper and I were alone. I tossed back my scotch and Thomas refilled my glass.

Twenty four hours later, as I watched John dressed in his armor, and piece by piece he became lost to me. When the helmet covered his face, I faced the fact that he is gone from me forever now, hidden behind his armor. The Spartan who stood alone. For eleven months he'd been mine. We fought together, slept together and forged a bond.

We hadn't slept in two nights. We walked the ship, we talked and we made love slowly and thoroughly. Memorizing each new scare and honoring the old ones. We talked about Dr. Halsey and his complicated feelings toward her. But as I listened to him speak, I realized he'd come to terms with those childhood memories. And with a reassuring embrace, let me know he forgave me for my part in her disappearance. So when he showed me Cortana's chip, which he'd been carrying around with him. I retrieved an extra dog tag chain from a desk drawer, threaded it through the chip and placed around his neck myself.

In the early hours of our last night together he brought me to an organism so powerful my reaction was to hold on to him, cling to him, and there were words on my lips, but as I had always done. I stopped them.

"Sarah, open your eyes." His fingers were tracing my lips. "You always stop. Say it this time. Let me hear the words."

I felt the sting of tears.

"Say it, please!"

Of course I love you, John. Always."

"I love you too my beautiful Sarah. Thank you for teaching me how."

The next morning, as he turned to leave me and board the Broadsword. I called out, not giving a damn who heard me. "I love you, John. I hope you find what you're looking for."

With quick fierce strides he came back at me, as if he were ready to strike, grabbing by the arms and lifted me up against his armor.

"I'm searching for Cortana's signal. I've already found what I need. Do it!"

I slid two fingers across his faceplate and pressed my cheek against it just as I had the first time. Then he set me down and pulled the band holding my hair back. As my hair swung forward he turned and walked out of my life.

There was movement behind me, as one by one the Fire Teams joined me at the railing to watch Master Chief's departure. Thorne stood next to me and offered a reassuring smile. DeMarco stepped up, but kept his eyes on the Broadsword. For the first time in his life, DeMarco had met another man whom he could respect. I knew Paul would miss him too. My teams surrounded me in a show of respect and support. I loved my Spartan's, but one of them was leaving and I had no idea if I would ever see him again.

Master Chief Petty Officer Sierra-117 launched the Broadsword into space.

Tall enough? There was no one who could match his integrity, courage and loyalty. He was simply legendary and for a short time he'd been mine.

* * *

><p>Love<p>

I get so lost sometimes

Days pass

And this emptiness fills my heart

When I want to run away

I drive off in my car

But whichever way I go

I come back to the place you are

All my instincts

They return

The grand façade

So soon will burn

Without a noise

Without my pride
I reach out from the inside
In your eyes
The light, the heat
In your eyes
I am complete
In your eyes
I see the doorway
To a thousand churches
In your eyes
The resolution
In your eyes
Of all the fruitless searches
Oh, I see the light and the heat
In your eyes
Oh, I want to be that complete
I want to touch the light
The heat I see in your eyes
Love
I don't like to see so much pain
So much wasted
And this moment keeps slipping away
I get so tired
Working so hard for our survival
I look to the time with you
To keep me awake and alive
And all my instincts
They return
And the grand façade
So soon will burn

Without a noise
Without my pride
I reach out from the inside
In your eyes, in your eyes
In your eyes, in your eyes
In your eyes
The light the heat
In your eyes
I am complete
In your eyes
I see the doorway
To a thousand churches
In your eyes
The resolution
In your eyes
Of all the fruitless searches
Oh, I see the light and the heat
In your eyes
Oh, I want to be that complete
I want to touch the light
The heat I see in your eyes
In your eyes, in your eyes
In your eyes, in your eyes
In your eyes, in your eyes
-Peter Gabriel

8. Tall Enough For You? 8

TITLE: Tall Enough for You

CHAPTER: Epilogue

0500

AN: Thank you for reading and I hope you enjoyed the story so far. Several reviewers requested a sequel. I invite you to continue with the story titled Tall Enough for You, The Sequel. Thanks again.

* * *

><p>She heard the summons for the mission briefing. Roland is calling her. If she could raise her head from the floor she would put on her uniform, gear up and join them.<p>

The teams are waiting for her in anticipation of orders to move out. The mission clock was started an hour ago.

But the floor is so cool against her cheek. This is the third morning she's spent in this position. She missed John. But she never expected it to become a physical thing. She didn't have time for the flu. Spartans don't get sick! She knows if she moved a muscle - even just her eyes she will start vomiting againâ€| and again. She hasn't eaten in two days. There's nothing left in her.

Captain Lasky paced the deck and watched the scenario unfold. Today marks the third day Commander Palmer failed to report in and the fourth training mission she's missed. This morning he made a decision. He called Paul DeMarco to him and placed him in charge of the training mission. With a glare that was equal parts, good luck and don't screw up Captain Lasky ordered him to turn to.

All he saw in the gloom of her quarters was an unmade bed and a rumpled uniform in a pile on the deck. A groan from the bathroom directed him to the only other door in the room. He promised himself no matter what he finds on the other side of this door, he is here to help a friend.

Slowly swinging open the door. His eyes take it all in at a glance.

Once the color of fall leaves, her hair is lank and dull on her cheeks. The dark circles under her eyes look like bruises in the dim light. His eye traveled down her body. She's dressed in briefs and a white t-shirt so large that he knows it must have belonged to the Master Chief. The subtle and not so subtle signs are all there.

Shrugging off his uniform jacket, he moistened a cloth and joined her on the floor. Once he got her cleaned up he rinsed out the cloth and placed it gently on the back of her neck. If he was right about this and her. There was so much he wanted to say, but this was certainly not the time. So he tipped her face up to his and offered her his arms.

She accepted the embrace gratefully by bursting into tears.

"I'm sick and my emotions are all over the place," she mumbled against his shoulder.

A smile tugged at his mouth. Pushing her hair back from her face, he turned his face against her cheek. With no idea how she might take this he said simply, "Sarah? You're not sick."

End
file.